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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a discussion on counseling and excellence between Garry R. Walz (director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel Services and former president of the American Association for Counseling and Development--AACD), Edwin L. Herr (former president of AACD), and Jean A. Thompson (president of AACD). Topics covered in the informal discussion include counselors' contributions to educational excellence, counselors' negative images, counselor evaluation, and the role of counselor education and professional associations in promoting educational excellence. Specific recommendations for counselors in the area of educational excellence conclude the paper. (MCF)

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# THE ROLE OF COUNSELING IN ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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Edwin L. Herr, Jean A. Thompson, Garry R. Walz

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# THE ROLE OF COUNSELING IN ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Edwin L. Herr
Jean A. Thompson
Garry R. Walz

Mary C. Frenza
Editor

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## Foreword

Notable by its absence is any mention of counselors in the report, A Nation at Risk. This has been both a surprise and a shock to the counseling community, involved as they are in assisting young people to maximize the meaning of their schooling to their present and future lives. It is a significant oversight that such an omission would occur. In many ways, we think this omission is a reflection of the low priority that counselors have given to communicating their involvement in helping students achieve a personal excellence.

As a first step in apprising both the educational community and the general public of counselors' many contributions, we invited Dr. Ed Herr, then President of AACD, and Dr. Jean Thompson, President-elect of AACD, to converse with us regarding their views on the counselor role in educational excellence. Meeting informally, and without prior preparation, we had an easy and fast dialogue with a give-and-take challenge to one another. Hopefully, the reader will sense some of the excitement and interest that was present among us. More specifically, we hope the reader will come to better understand the large variety of indirect and direct contributions that counselors make to educational excellence.

Through their multiplicity of contacts with different publics, counselors can be an effective force for public understanding of who they are and what they do. They do not need to mount a major advertising campaign, or to devote hard-pressed funds and time to develop a glossy media image of themselves. But they can and should seize the opportunity to share the ways they have intervened and touched the lives of the many students with whom they work. Hopefully, this publication will encourage counselors to start telling their stories to more people. There is a need for people to hear them. And no one can tell it better than counselors themselves.

Garry R. Walz

## Introduction to Counseling and Excellence

**Walz:** Why don't we begin with each of us taking a few moments to give a short introduction to our thoughts about counseling and educational excellence.

**Herr:** I was looking for the definition of excellence in A Nation at Risk. I really have no trouble with that definition per se, in which the view of excellence is that individual ability needs to test and push back personal limits. In many ways that's what counseling is about, too. I think that the counselor needs to try to push back individual limits by creating options, by empowering people to feel confident in their ability to take chances and to cope with the chances available to them. But excellence defined in those terms requires a much broader view of the interaction between the individual and the environment than is sometimes true. We get tied into a particular choice or a particular option and see it very narrowly, rather than as a series of processes in which the choice that one makes becomes the branch point for a variety of options and the consequences that arise from that choice. Any counselor who is excellent is able to understand not only a particular set of options but also the particular consequences of those options for social and economic events, and for lifestyle characteristics. Excellence in this fairly broad view of individual-environment transactions is the counselor's ability to help people develop intelligence about their personal characteristics and aspirations as well as competence in dealing with their options and in coping with the consequences of those chosen.

**Thompson:** I would start by saying that I think that counselors agree, without any doubt, that education is the most important job facing our nation today and in the future. One of the major criticisms of guidance and counseling has been, and continues to be, the difficulty that counselors have in assessing the outcomes of counseling, in evaluating, in a specific sense, what counseling contributes to the broad social or educational goals. Shaw, in his book on The Function and Theory of Guidance Programs, which he wrote in 1968, was among the first to note that most descriptions of guidance services have been confined to what is done (like individual counseling, testing, maintenance of records, scheduling and information giving) rather than to why these things are done. In short, guidance programs have always dealt with the processes to be expected rather than the products. In this age of accountability, students, administrators, parents, legislators, and community people

are saying to counselors, "We want to know just what you intend and what your goals are, and how the students will be different after they have gone through the counseling program or have been exposed to a guidance program. How do you distinguish your services and contributions from those of other educational processes?" Perhaps that is why counselors have not been included in some of the reports on educational excellence. People have not understood the counseling product, merely the process.

**Walz:** I would certainly agree with what both of you have said. I do think that when various review groups use the term "excellence," they are really referring to excellence in the sense of achievement and school learning. I think our use of the term, and certainly counselors would define excellence in this way, refers to the broad array of learnings and behaviors that they are committed to helping students acquire, in whatever educational setting they're in. I think counselors' notions about excellence are broader than some of the reports, certainly than that of A Nation at Risk, which has a very strong achievement and educational performance orientation. I think that when we think about excellence, we use two references: What is excellence, given this individual's capacities? Being excellent in this context means being able to achieve or perform at a level which is commensurate pretty much with the best that a person can do. I see that as an important excellence. I think there is another excellence, and we see it increasingly in A Nation at Risk, and that is, what does society define as important for people to live and function in that society? So we see in A Nation at Risk references to computer literacy. One who is excellent in education now has some special skills and ability in that area. I would want counselors to be responsive to both of those definitions of excellence; achieving the potential that Ed was speaking to, and responding to clear mandates for what one needs to function adequately in our society today.

## Counselors' Contributions

**Walz:** Having tossed around what we think excellence is, could we look at what we think counselors are doing now to promote excellence in education in the schools? Can we provide some specific examples? Jean, you've known counselors in school settings and in your work as president of ASCA. Are there some examples that you could point to that show how counselors are contributing to excellence?

**Thompson:** Yes, there are. Counselors are one of the greatest resources in the schools, not only for the students but also for the teachers, parents, and administrators. I think through the resources they have, both formal and informal, and the contacts they have out in the community and with business and industry, counselors can help students to see the need for excellence in the academic areas. For example, in the school where I am, the career counselors are involved in several programs with the English department as well as the foreign language department. These are career programs--what careers do you go into if you're an English major or a liberal arts major? Or, how can you use foreign languages in careers? In providing these programs for students the counselors coordinate with different divisions; then they go one step further by providing a program that answers these questions: What skills does one need to achieve in order to have a career in a particular area? As a result, students are beginning to see the need to take algebra, trig, and plane geometry, and, of course, foreign languages. At times students have asked, "What do I get out of this? Why do I need to take this particular course?" I think counselors are taking the lead in assisting students to define the reasons that certain basic skills and certain programs are needed if they are going to choose a particular career. This is just one example of career counselors contributing to excellence.

Other examples are assisting students in decision making processes, and assisting students who have problems external to the academic area that are interfering with the academic learning process. Counselors have been doing this all along. Sometimes they do not think they get the credit they deserve or perhaps have the exposure that they need so that others know what they are doing. I think parents know and teachers with whom counselors work certainly know; but I don't think that the general public, the legislators, the schools boards, or even the administrators in the schools realize the extent to which counselors support excellence.

**Walz:** Ed, I know you've had a real identification with the preparation of counselors, both as the head of a counselor education and a counseling psychology program and as past-president of ACES. Do you see counselors actively involved in promoting excellence in schools?

**Herr:** I think they are. I think that Jean identified some of the very important concepts which are not clearly articulated by counselors or understood by the public. I think one of the questions that needs to be addressed is, "What are the elements of educational excellence?" They are obviously not just intellectual. Many of the reports tend to equate achievement with intellectual prowess and they don't go beyond that. The fact of the matter is, we're quite aware that a great many young people are preoccupied with a lot of things which, in a sense, impede or get in the way of intellectual achievement. It may be problems with friends, it may be malnutrition, it may be being abused at home, or worrying about their family which is in transition. All of these kinds of things get in the way of educational excellence because they reduce the attention span, they reduce the kind of focus that students can give to learning tasks. That's a very long way of getting to the point, which is that counselors do contribute to educational excellence. Certainly they do help with study skills, with course selection, with the relationship between course selections and the world of work, and all of those things give purpose to educational excellence. But more importantly than that, it seems to me, they recognize what a lot of people don't, and that is that intellect is but a speck on a sea of emotion. Unless you can manage your own emotional life effectively, sort it out, put it into some kind of perspective which allows you not to waste or use all your energy in dealing with emotional traumas and personal concerns, educational excellence really can't exist. Counselors, in my judgment, are very effective in helping young people manage the emotional dimensions of their lives, and in helping them gain a perspective which allows them to devote more energy to the academic and intellectual side of their lives than they would otherwise. I think, as Jean has suggested, most people don't know that about counselors. Parents who have been directly involved with young people and who have had these kinds of counselors and been exposed to the kinds of skills that counselors have may know it, but obviously they don't stand on street corners and say, "My counselor really helped my youngster or helped us with our family considerations." That's not the kind of PR that happens. So the counselor's function in educational excellence is both direct and

indirect. The direct frequently is not given the attention that it deserves. But certainly the indirect, the emotional support to young people and the sorting out of emotional issues, is the more invisible part, and probably the part which counselors are given least credit for but in which they make the most contributions. So the issue of counselors' contributions to excellence becomes a question of visibility and communication and public image.

**Walz:** While I'm usually one of those who is quick to suggest that counseling needs to have a clearer focus and that counselors need to work with students or clients to define what sort of outcomes would be important to them, I think it's clear that if we had the counseling approach that many people call for, namely, extremely specific counseling for learning and study skills, or for avoiding termination of school or a variety of other very specific goals, then we might ignore the fact that much of counseling is associated with helping people develop positive self-concepts or enhance their self-esteem. Whether it's a young person or an adult, education is not going to "take" unless people have a sense of their own worth and see some real opportunities for achieving or performing in a variety of areas. A lot of counselors have done what many critics have called personal counseling; and they really have contributed to the performance of students in school because they have helped them feel better about themselves and as a consequence to do better in school, to achieve more.

## Counselors' Negative Images

**Walz:** We're all sounding very positive in suggesting that counselors can and do desirable things for excellence, and yet one thing I think we've all said at times is that many counselors have negative images. In fact, one suggestion has been that the reason counselors were not specifically mentioned by name in A Nation at Risk is that they're seen as non-contributive to educational excellence. What might be some of the reasons why counselors have such a negative image in relation to school performance?

**Thompson:** I think one of the reasons is that many of them are too busy doing their jobs and not doing the PR that should go along with them. I have suggested over and over that counselors need a program, a plan of action, and that this plan of action be communicated to their administrators and faculty. "These are our plans for the year. We have goals, and we want to accomplish certain programs."

We also need to communicate our programs to the community. I have never hesitated to suggest to counselors that they bring in the local newspaper reporters and arrange coverage for different counseling programs in their schools. This is a positive way of letting the community know that we're doing group programs in leadership development, in personal development, in building positive self-esteem, in career exploration, even in such areas as preparing eighth graders for dating. Anything that is interesting to the students, or where they have a need--let the community know that the local high school has a program for this.

In the same way, counselors seem not to promote themselves and their programs, not only to one another, but to the faculty, the administrators, and the school board. Many times I have suggested that counselors ask for a program spot for the PTA or for the school board meeting, because naturally these areas get local news coverage. Counselors say, "We don't have time," "We're too busy." Well, if you sit in your office or you sit in a classroom and you're doing the greatest things in the world and no one knows about it, then you're not likely to get a lot of credit for it or a lot of support when it comes time to decide whether your program is justified and should be continued.

I'd like to make another suggestion for promoting the counseling program. Let guidance be a part of the curriculum, not an extracurricular activity. I think many counselors see what they do as something extra. Students come after school,

or before school, or during the lunch hour, or in the evening, but it's never built into the curriculum as a period during the day. Have what is called a Counseling Hour; it could be an extra course or a workshop or a seminar, or it could be on a rotating basis, but at least have some time built into the curriculum.

You also have to build your program into the budget of the school. Many counselors either do not have a budget or the budget is controlled and built by someone else. When that happens we don't always get what we deserve; many times people don't know what counselors need. To be a vital part of the school just like any other division, counselors need to promote their image among their colleagues.

**Herr:** I think there are a number of things that Jean has already alluded to that I'd like to extend. One of the concerns that I have is that, very frequently, complaints or concerns about counselors come to the administrator but never really get to the counselor. I have consulted in situations where the administrator allows these complaints to orbit and they take on a life of their own. There is no systematic attempt to defuse them, to send them to the counselor who is being criticized, so that the counselor can work with the person making the complaint and clarify the situation.

In addition to Jean's excellent suggestions, there are a couple of other points that I think would be useful. I think counseling programs can profit from having a community advisory committee or, indeed, a committee of teachers in a building, whose primary role would be to understand and explain to parents, other community members, or teachers what is going on, to explain what the programs are, to explain the difficulties that are inherent in being a counselor. I worked with one fairly large district in a midwest state where the school board was attacking the counselors, and the community was attacking the counselors. The complaints were remaining at the chief administrator's level, never getting down to the counselor's office where they could be dealt with. We were able to put together a community advisory board, and through them to make some reports to the board and to the community, and all of a sudden a lot of these people who were so vocally critical discovered that they were asking the wrong questions and that they were not really understanding the kind of reality that counselors work with. These same people became the counselors' strongest advocates. It was a communication issue. While that may seem very trite and pedestrian, in many cases that is the issue—a matter of communication about what counselors can and cannot do.

At another level, many counselors, particularly those who were trained in the early days of the NDEA, were taught to believe that what they did was value free, that they ought to be in their office and not be a part of the educational process, because somehow they weren't educators, they were something else. In many instances, it wasn't clear whether they were psychologists or some other kind of specialist. But if they got wrapped up in the educational process, somehow they would be vulnerable, students wouldn't come to them, they would be seen as evaluative. The fact of the matter is, it seems to me, that in taking that stand many counselors lost their potential for making contributions or, perhaps more important, their sense of contributing to the educational process. My own feeling is that there are a whole series of studies which suggest that counselors have been very effective in helping with racial integration in education, for example; in developing study skills; in the kind of decision making and career development processes that Jean was alluding to; in helping young people to deal with learning disabilities or phobic reactions to school; in helping students to develop a different form of adjustment or a different set of management skills. All of those things contribute to educational excellence, to the education process. But unless you make the connections, people don't see the connections. They see them as disparate, independent things which sit off on the side until you make the bridge to the educational process and talk about the essential quality of this kind of counselor activity for helping youngsters cope with academic tasks effectively.

There are a whole series of communication needs for counselors, almost self-concept changes, which counselors need to undergo as they look at what they do--not seeing their tasks as just a bunch of random events each day, which sometimes happens to all of us, but acknowledging and understanding that seeing all those youngsters and doing the things they do really does connect to the education process. Our job is not some sort of first-aid station but a very essential part of an educational mission. I think it's that kind of connecting of counselor contributions to the educational process which really becomes very important in light of what the national reports are saying and what they are omitting.

**Walz:** I think I would agree that probably the greatest involvement of counselors in schools over the years has been to help people go on to other educational opportunities, particularly aiding students in the higher socioeconomic groups to go on to college. In a real sense this is facilitating academic excellence by

helping students have more opportunity to develop their talents and potential. More specifically, I think that counselors do reflect the kind of values we're talking about; it's only fairly recently that people have had much concern or interest in the idea of improving academic performance in schools. There have been other priorities, other avenues--equity, school retention, development of a wide range of career skills, drug abuse--these have occupied a large number of our counselors. While it's correct to say they may not have been directly involved in facilitating academic excellence, I think it's unfair to blame them for not doing that because they've had other kinds of priorities.

**Herr:** If you pick up on that for just a moment, Garry, I think it's a fascinating idea. If you really track what's happened to counselors in the last 20-25 years, you find they have, in fact, been very effective in doing what people told them to do. What people told them to do might be the wrong thing, but the fact of the matter is, they have done it very well. If you take the NDEA situation once again, which was designed to increase the numbers of students identified as capable in the sciences and get them into colleges, that is precisely what has happened over the last two decades. College enrollments have gone up, students have gone into science and math, and counselors have been able to identify and encourage students who have these kinds of capabilities. When P.L. 94-142 came along with its major emphasis on education for the handicapped, counselors, particularly elementary school counselors, were diverted into writing IEP's and working with teachers. In many cases they became the main coordinators of development of individual education prescriptions. Counselors really weren't prepared for that role, but they took it on because that's what the legislation said, that's what schools needed. And I think you can track a lot of these kinds of examples. The college-bound situation is a superb example. That's precisely what many districts were concerned about; they wanted youngsters to get financial aid and they wanted them to get into "the best colleges." And that's precisely where counselors put their emphasis, because that's what the board, the administration wanted them to do. Again, whether those were the right things to do in some kind of global value set is a different issue; the fact of the matter is, counselors did do them and did them well and did them because somebody in the school or community really felt that that's where they ought to put their priority and energy. One has to be as realistic about what's happening as one can be, rather than simply attributing fault. In fact,

what has happened to the counselor role through the years has followed changing community or school values at different historical points.

**Walz:** It could be a case of counselors doing only too well what schools and parents and society wanted them to do. As a consequence, they have pleased some but displeased others. Following these priorities may have contributed to the negative image counselors have or to their sense that they are not contributive to schools.

Maybe we could look for a minute at some self-defeating areas for counselors that further influence their negative image. One that immediately comes to my mind relates to what Jean was speaking to earlier when she suggested that counselors need to be more involved in the curriculum. I was thinking of how often counselors have seen themselves as almost apart from the school, as a separate service which is not really educational, but a cloistered, self-referred, non-accountable or responsive service. Becoming as divorced as they did from the school, counselors failed to build any real support constituency or any understanding of what they do. I see that as being very self-defeating.

Can we think of other examples of self-defeating behaviors that counselors adopt which may unwittingly contribute to their negative self-image in school settings?

**Thompson:** To follow up what you were just saying about counselors' setting themselves apart from the school and its academic activities, let's remember that when counseling first became a popular position to have in the schools, most of the counselors had to come in as part-time counselors. They would be a counselor for three to five hours a day and continue to teach one or two classes. While counselors were not meant to do this, and while the goal was to get the counselor out of the classroom, I felt then, and continue to feel, that had they continued, perhaps not teaching an academic class, but having a place in that classroom, once a day or three times a week or whatever the arrangement would have been, they would have continued to relate to the faculty, they would have had the support of the faculty with whom they had to work.

As an experiment several years ago, we set up a counseling hour every day with some eighth grade students. Time was set aside from 1:00-2:00 in the day and we literally assigned students to come to the seminars and workshops that we were giving. Some of the seminars lasted two weeks and some four weeks. The students

enjoyed it, the teachers saw the counselors in the classrooms, and the counselors were responsible for 30 students each. Too many times when a principal has to cut a budget, he thinks of 20 or 30 students sitting in a classroom, with a teacher for them. I think this is one way that counselors get cut from the budget, because while they counsel 400 students and the ratio is 400:1 or 300:1 (in one case it was 600:1), administrators still do not see this counselor as tied to 20 or 30 students and as responsible for that group. I think as counselors we did ourselves a disservice when we completely left the classroom group setting. Had we continued in that setting throughout the years, we would have generated a lot more support. We would have had some direction because we would have had to prepare for those students. It could have been something in the curriculum. There are any number of areas that we could have covered--career development, career exploration, job search skills, improving self-esteem and self-concept, academic advisement. Really, I have always felt strongly that we should have continued in the curriculum along with the other faculty members.

**Herr:** I think there are a number of areas where counselors are self-defeating. One of the things that has always troubled me is that when counselors get a referral from a teacher or from a principal they may not follow up tangibly. They may see the child and do testing or counseling, but they do not do such simple things as putting a note in the teacher's box saying, "I appreciate the referral. I will be seeing Johnny Jones." They don't have to tell what they're seeing him about. They don't have to tell what the content is; but unless teachers get the feeling that their referrals are important and that counselors are really going to do something, they're going to stop referring.

I think another issue, which in some ways relates to what Jean said, is that perpetuating the myth that you must see everyone in a case load of 350 or 400 students, every year, individually, is not going to work. There are too many schools in which the amount of time the student is allocated a year is 16 minutes or so. You can't do anything but open yourself to criticism if all you can do is see a kid 16 minutes a year. On the other hand, if you were to develop an active group program which is skill-building, whether it has to do with academic choice or study skills or career development or whatever, then you have some kind of contact with everyone. Students can see you and know what you're about. Then divide your time in such a way that you can see children who have some kind of priority need on an

individual basis, rather than just parading students through because it's their turn. I think this type of approach is a much more effective time-management strategy than compulsively seeing every student individually whether or not there is a need. It still allows you to develop a preventive orientation, a constructive skill-building orientation. It allows you to be seen as a person who has group skills, who has, in a sense, a semi-teaching role with very clearly defined outcomes.

Another pet concern that I've had for a long time is that counselors have argued for separate, differential pay scales. I can understand their financial concerns in economic terms, but it isn't very good political strategy. If we're really trying to get teacher support and be seen as part of a faculty group but with a different specialization, setting ourselves up with a differential pay scale from teachers won't be very effective. Teachers have resented it. They have wondered, based on the fact that counselors don't have classroom demands and 150 students to worry about each day, why counselors are so special when the teachers typically have the same educational level: a master's degree. This particular issue has been a very serious political problem in many schools.

**Walz:** Certainly one issue that many schools are facing now in the area that you're speaking to, Ed, is the whole idea of merit pay for teachers. Should we have merit pay for counselors?

**Herr:** I have trouble with the whole merit pay concept. I think it's an interesting idea; I don't think that anybody that I know of has devised an effective merit pay formula which is not going to cause dissension, conflict and confusion. You can come at merit pay from an awful lot of different angles. If you're going to do it with teachers, for example, and reward them simply on the basis of students' making higher test scores, I don't think that's going to result in educational excellence as a lot of reports are defining it. When you start to talk about merit pay for counselors, I think the whole area gets much fuzzier and I'm not sure at all that I would support that particular issue.

**Thompson:** Counselors in many of the school systems already have additional salary for extended work days. Many of them work ten hours a day, and have an extended year, which adds at least two more months, sometimes three, to the contract. I think this has brought a lot of criticism from the teachers, especially because in some divisions teachers work 10 and 14 hours a day, and they're not given extra compensation.

## Counselor Evaluation

**Waiz:** We hear a lot of administrators or parents say, "What is a good counselor like? What are the things that a really contributing counselor would do to improve students' learning performance in schools?" Can we name some things that parents or administrators could use in a quick way to see if their counselors are really contributing to the performance of the students in their school?

**Herr:** I think there are a number of things, even though that question is a very difficult one, because, typically, we have not thought of it in those terms. Obviously, there are different kinds of instruments that one could use to assess whether a youngster has learned or changed attitudes or come to perform more effectively. I think the prior issue really is what counselors ought to be responsible for. It seems to me that what we've not done in schools is say that counselors will be responsible for certain kinds of outcomes. Part of the problem of counselor evaluation is, as Jean said in her first comments, that frequently there is a description of what counselors do, not why they do it. Until schools are clear about what behavioral expectations of students counselors are responsible for, whether it's decision making or self-esteem or whatever, it's going to be very difficult to evaluate counselors. In a sense, they could be held accountable for many, many things for which they really have no direct responsibility or which are really out of their control.

To extend the point, there is not a common set of behavioral expectations from school to school about what counselors ought to be responsible for. It depends on how many counselors there are, what other kinds of resources there are, how the school was conceived in terms of whether guidance is in the curriculum or not. All these things relate to the negotiations about counselor direction that ought to take place in a particular school between the administration and the counselors. Once you get to that point, then you can define certain instruments or indicators of counselor performance. Until you get to that point, it's very difficult. We just start pulling things off the shelf and say this is relevant or this is not relevant, and that's not the way to evaluate any group of professional people.

**Thompson:** I think that counselors can be evaluated in two ways: One is through their program. When they do their plan of action at the beginning of the year, divide it throughout the quarters or semesters; then do a periodic evaluation

of how much of that plan has been accomplished, to what degree it's effective or ineffective. Decide what changes need to be made at that particular point in the year. That's one way to evaluate them. The other is to have a parallel professional development plan for the individual counselor. This plan could include formal courses they would take at the local university, or it could be professional development through attending conventions or professional workshops, or presenting professional workshops themselves. Within our own school system, for example, we do a number of seminars and workshops for high school and elementary counselors within a 50-mile radius of our college. So not only are those counselors learning new information, they are also sharing this information.

So many times counselors are not evaluated by anyone, not by administrators, not even by themselves. When they begin to justify their program, then all of a sudden people get all excited about an evaluation instrument and how they were evaluated on this or that. And in truth they have not been evaluated. I think that's as important as anything in the counseling program, but it does not seem to get a great deal of emphasis.

**Herr:** There is another very interesting dimension which flows from what Jean said and that is that when you put together such a professional development plan or a plan of responsibility for counselors, then you can also begin to tie inservice and a lot of other things to it in some meaningful way. Until you know what people are really responsible for, either individually or collectively, inservice tends to be very random. It may have nothing to do with the competencies people need to develop or the responsibilities that they need to be helped to discharge more effectively. Some inservice programs can be totally inappropriate in terms of where people are in their own development. This kind of evaluation planning, from an efficiency standpoint as well as an accountability standpoint, provides a base that fits things together much more professionally and more systematically.

**Walz:** I would like to suggest that people look to see if counselors have the kind of goals that you've both mentioned. I'm very impressed with the research that suggests that achieving people, people who perform well, whether it's in business and industry or educational settings, are those people who are regularly involved in setting and resetting goals, goals for a day, or a week, or a month, or a year. They have in mind some hierarchy of outcomes, and as they work at those and achieve some of them, then they change them and form new ones. In a follow-up study of

geniuses, researchers found at the end of 30 years that those who had really achieved the most were those who were constantly involved in setting and resetting goals. I think that has implications both for counselors and the students they work with. Are counselors in their schools actually setting goals? You've both talked about the need to have some way of saying, "This is what we're focused on. These are the priorities we're working toward." Do counselors work with students this way? Do they help students set some goals for their work in school, so that they're not just going to school but going to school for specific outcomes that have personal meaning?

## The Role of Counselor Education

**Walz:** Some people would say that you can trace counselors' behavior and performance right back to the kind of counselor education program that they had. That's where it all starts and what gives them their direction and their attitudes. What can we say to counselor educators about what they should be doing to bring about excellence in schools?

**Herr:** Counselor educators are like counselors. Some are very good. Some have been assigned to these roles with relatively little experience themselves. Some have done an awful lot of different things in different institutions; others have specialized in a particular area in one institution. It's hard to talk about any group as though it's homogeneous. I just don't think that's the case.

I do think that counselor educators have got to be willing to change their programs. They've got to be able to engage in the same kind of planning that they expect counselors to engage in, the same kind of evaluation. And, although sometimes it's very difficult, counselor educators have got to create a mentality, both in their students and in themselves, that there is no way a counselor education program can anticipate all the circumstances a counselor is going to face. What they have to do is to create a context for counselors to anticipate a continuous reinforcement of their own professional development by incorporating such notions as: It's important to know the literature, to be adaptable, to understand the changes that are occurring, to be able to build from fundamental skills, to be flexible enough to apply those skills to new situations as new problems arise. Counselor educators cannot feel guilty if they have not put a course in their program for every possible eventuality that counselors are going to face in the public schools or in other settings. It just doesn't work that way.

Also, I think counselor educators need to have available to them a professional development plan, a system of some sort for renewal, for inservice, which goes beyond sabbaticals. Sabbaticals are important and they're nice, but they're too infrequent. They occur too rarely to provide the feedback and the inservice that counselor educators need to deal with emerging issues and skills.

**Walz:** Jean, you work with a lot of people who are the products or the graduates of counselor education programs. What sort of things do these counselors say they would like to have had but didn't? What things would they rather have had? What kinds of emphases are important to them?

**Thompson:** Well, I have heard counselors say that their programs seem to lack balance. While they get the theory and the formalized educational background, they do not have enough hands-on experience. I know that they do practicums, and they participate in internships, but these seem to be so structured that it's not like the real world. Another area is budgeting and financing. This seems to be completely lacking. When counselors go into a school setting, they don't readily stand up to make out their own budgets and to work out their own financial priorities. This has not been an emphasis for them, and I have heard this more and more: "If we could just have a course in budget planning, or constructing a budget, or defending a budget."

And then, of course, the newest area for counselors is learning to use computers. The counselors that are coming through the schools now have more experience than those that came through five years ago, and more certainly than those of 20 years ago. I certainly hope all university counseling departments are including something in the area of computer literacy.

Our professional associations are trying to set up national standards for counseling programs. We hope to have quality programs across the nation rather than some good and some bad and some in between. I know that the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) has begun to answer this need for national standards. AACD would not have had the response of 9,000 people taking the NBCC exam if there had not been a need. Even we did not realize how great that need was. Three times the number we had anticipated took the exam. The need is there and this provided an answer to the need.

In addition to the NBCC's role in counselor standards, AACD's Council for the Accreditation of Counseling in Related Educational Programs (CACREP) has and is continuing to upgrade counseling standards for the graduate schools through which our counseling programs are offered. Each year the number of schools that request an evaluation through CACREP is increasing, which shows again that there is a need and desire for quality counselor education and performance.

**Walz:** Some years ago counselors really had to retool themselves with the advent of career education. We came to realize that not every counselor could be helpful and contributive in the area of career guidance and career development, operating from the knowledge base they then had. We're saying that counselors are now going to be more heavily involved in promoting educational excellence. Are there some new knowledge bases that we feel they should have?

**Herr:** I think there are a number of knowledge bases; I'm not sure that they're new, and I'm also not sure they have been standard fare in counselor education. Increasingly, I am persuaded that counselors need to give a lot more attention to economics, sociology, anthropology, probably to political science, than they have gotten in counselor education. I think that counselor education has been so dominated by psychology that we tend to look only at individual action, the potential or the deficits, and we really do not understand as fully as we might, individual-environment transactions, the relationship of social, economic, and occupational events to individual action. To just give you one quick illustration of that: If you talk in terms of career development or career decision making, I think that by and large we have not helped counselors understand the different forms of unemployment and the factors that cause unemployment. By the same token, I don't think we've helped counselors understand the differences in labor markets, internal labor markets, external labor markets, how you get in, how you get out, all of that. In a sense, we need a much greater understanding of the environmental effects and differences in many of these major areas that we talk about fairly glibly, but tend to view as almost monolithic. They are not monolithic in their actual operation, or in those aspects that counselors need to help their clients relate to. So I think there's a lot of need in those particular areas.

Certainly one can mention computer literacy as a focus that needs to be included in counselor training. But again, the question is, "What does that mean?" Computer literacy has been a fairly interesting buzzword recently, but do we really mean operating computers, running computers, programming computers, knowing about computers, knowing about what computers can do--all those things tend to get clouded in our press to have people know more. We have to dismantle these knowledge bases and demystify what it is we're talking about so that we can design learning strategies that are effective and not just so superficial that in the last analysis they really don't amount to very much anyway. These are not new areas, but they do need to be re-emphasized, or expanded in counselor training.

**Walz:** I would certainly agree with what you've said and would add the whole area of cognition and learning which has been receiving more emphasis in research and within all of psychology. If we are really going to be involved in helping students to be more effective in their learning environments, there is much that we can do to help them learn to learn, to understand better their own learning styles,

to be aware of the way that they think and make decisions. There are a variety of counselor interventions that really can, one, help students understand the learning processes they use and, two, become more skillful in their natural learning style. There's much literature out there on this topic and certainly counselor education can do a lot more to help counselors become aware of that literature and to make use of it.

## The Role of the Professional Association

**Walz:** Is there a role for the professional association in counseling for educational excellence?

**Herr:** Yes, there is a very serious place for the professional association. I think Jean has already alluded to a number of things that professional associations have done over the last several decades. They have set standards for counselor education and issued position statements about counselor role and function. The whole credentialing movement has gotten its impetus from the professional associations. Obviously, the credentialing movement takes many forms and has to be interactive. Jean has talked about standards, about accreditation processes, about the registry of certified counselors, which is something a professional association is going to do better than anybody else. What the professional association really does is represent the fact that the association and the profession it represents are very serious about increasing competency and about identifying qualified people and approved programs.

However, when you talk in those terms, you start to recognize that professional associations have other roles, too. They have roles in stimulating the intellectual capital that undergirds what we mean by standard development or certification. You can't develop a competency-based profession without having an intellectual capital. The professional associations have begun to recognize that upgrading the image of counselors and upgrading the competency of counselors is really multidimensional. You can't talk of standards or program accreditation without also talking about ethics. You can't talk about any of those things without recognizing that technology is becoming an increasingly important part of what counselors do. So ethics has to be defined differently, counselor preparation has to change to reflect that, counselor certification processes have to reflect such changes--all of these things become interactive. You have to recognize that when credentialing allows people to move outside of institutional supervision and into private practice, you also have to take into account issues like legal defense and the kind of political action that you need to engage in to allow people to have licensure and private practice opportunity. All of these things are professional associations' roles. They are probably better defined and operationalized by the professional association than by any other institution. Individual higher education

institutions can't do most of these things; they can improve their own program but they're very unlikely, as a single institution, to get into legal action or action that will move toward licensure. So the professional association offers the opportunity for collective action and it also offers the opportunity to operate multidimensionally as we move forward in trying to improve the profession.

**Thompson:** One of the areas in which professional associations can help a great deal is public relations. A professional association can give us a national identity. I'm hoping that next year, through the Committee to Improve the Image of Counseling and Counselors, we can come up with some television ads that portray the counselor in a very positive role so that our public can see just what the role of the school counselor is. They will see that there is a national association willing to come forward with information for them.

There are just worlds of information there for the counselor which we make available through our publications. If counselors never did get to go to a conference or convention or anything like that, if they just read the publications, they could keep abreast of what was going on, the current trends and future goals for the association and for the profession.

**Herr:** There is a very important advocacy role implicit in what Jean said. In a sense, the professional association has an opportunity to be the conscience of social policy. It can really help the legislators, the congresses, to understand the impact of different kinds of federal policies, state policies, and so forth, on client populations that we serve. It can take on an advocacy role in which counselors contribute to resolving a lot of the social and occupational problems that people experience. Again, that national critical mass in a professional association has a better opportunity to perform that kind of advocacy role than any sub-group of professionals or than any individual professional alone.

## Recommendations for Counseling and Excellence

**Walz:** Frequently, in looking toward change, what's needed is a rather pointed, succinct statement. Maybe we can wrap this up by having each of us make a recommendation about what counselors could do to bring about educational excellence. If you were asked that question, share the kind of thing that you would say, maybe over a cup of coffee. What recommendation could you make?

Let me start. A major step for any counselor is to recognize that he/she is a very strong force for improving learners' abilities to understand how they learn and to improve the learning process. I don't think the improvement of the learning process is going to come about to the extent that it could, unless counselors work actively to help people see learning as a priority and to work at it. There is, through ERIC and a variety of other sources, a great deal of information that counselors can use to assist students and adults to be more effective in how they undertake learning tasks. My recommendation would be for counselors to set the improvement of the learning process as a priority in their work. After all, this is a society in which lifelong learning is a major and increasing characteristic. Maybe the greatest service a counselor can provide counselees is to help them be a bit more effective in the whole task of functioning in a learning society. Their lifelong learning will be more efficient and more meaningful as a result of that interaction.

**Thompson:** Counselors could begin to improve their contribution to educational excellence by defining and communicating their roles to their colleagues, their administrators, and their public, and then by defining the parameters of their programs, their plan of action, their goals and priorities. The third step would be to integrate the role and the program parameters into the academic program using cooperation and collaboration, and a communication system with their faculties. As an integral part of that overall academic curriculum, they could assist the instructors as well as the students in accomplishing those academic goals. I think this would add a lot of substance to what they do, and communicate to others what they're doing as well.

**Herr:** I agree with both of you and I'm trying to figure out something else that's intelligent to say and it's very difficult. What I'm convinced of is that whether in learning tasks or in educational excellence, people must choose how they will be involved. They need to choose to be committed. The thing that concerns

me is that we've frequently talked about decision making very glibly and yet, decision making, helping young people to choose to be committed, to be involved with learning, to be disciplined, is really the heart of what counselors are about. They need to help young people realize that the choices they make create the realities with which they live. Fundamentally, if they decide not to be involved, not to learn, these are also choices. Counselors, in addition to helping to clarify learning styles and helping to define goals within the educational process, are very important crystallizers of choice for young people. The implications of choosing one style over another, of engaging in learning or some alternative are key counseling issues. How people choose defines their self-concept, their understanding of their opportunities. Counselors frequently don't understand the importance of such perspectives. Yet, decision making becomes a very important organizing glue for what counseling is about regardless of the setting in which it is applied.

## Conclusion
## Summing Up and New Perspective
### Garry R. Walz

The following statements represent a personal summation and integration of the comments which have been made. Additionally, they represent a new perspective toward the role of the school counselor in bringing about educational excellence.

1. It is clear from many of the reports on excellence in education that the student is frequently viewed as a non-person in terms of his/her own motivational structure and interests. Consistently, recommendations are made with reference to what should be done to and about students. Only rarely is reference made to the students' attitudes and feelings and how these affect their involvement in and response to their schooling. It is our point that student excellence will, in the long run, depend upon the attitudes and values and decisions of individual students. We can legislate the length of the school year, extend the school day, and promote more "rigor" in the school and the school curriculum. All of these have their consequences, some positive and some negative, as many commentators have pointed out. But ultimately, whether or not the recommendations work depends on how students respond to them; on how they personally value the changes which are being proposed, and if they see them as being meaningful to themselves and to their own lives. It is absolutely essential that we give attention to those persons for whom the changes are intended, and that they understand the significance of the changes and are prepared to assume responsibility for their role in the change. Ironically, at the very time that the business and industrial world is awakening to the importance of participatory decision-making and the need to consider the interest and values of the individual (as expressed in best-selling books such as In Search of Excellence, by Peters and Waterman, and Corporate Culture, by Deal and Kennedy), in the school environment we are talking almost as if the attitudes and feelings of the students are meaningless. More than anyone in the school, the counselor is in a position to interpret students to educational planners and decision-makers, and to emphasize the importance of understanding and working with the students' world as they themselves see it. To ignore students as people with needs and interests of their own is to insure that any changes that are adopted are window

and interests of their own is to insure that any changes that are adopted are window dressing and unlikely to significantly affect the people, i.e, the students, for whom the change is intended.

2. Assisting students to consider the array of options that exist for them, and to think through the consequences and the values of one option as contrasted with another, may be one of the most significant roles the counselor can play in the school environment. Students today are experiencing an increasing bombardment of choice and opportunity, particularly those students new to the full range of the contemporary opportunity structure. For example, minorities and women have options for which they have neither direct experience in their backgrounds nor good role models to follow. It is particularly important that we help young people both to become aware of the options that exist for them and to carefully think through the consequences of their choices. A crucial role here for the counselor is to encourage students to be willing to adopt options which involve risk and a change in behavior and values from what they have experienced in the past. Even failure and mediocrity have a seductive security. Students need both the support and the assistance of counselors in developing explicit plans and goals which will enable them to exercise those life-options which are likely to be the most rewarding and fulfilling for them.

3. Communicating major goals and commitments to their many publics is an infrequently exercised, but very important new priority for school counselors. It is of the utmost importance that they communicate what they are all about to those who make decisions about staffing, roles and resources. In establishing their roles and priorities, counselors need to seek the input of their important publics. It is also crucial that they be continuously in communication with the community about the progress or lack of progress in responding to their goals. Without both the community input and the regular communication back to the community, counselors may very well be seen as peripheral people performing isolated tasks or functions of only limited significance. So key is counselor communication to their publics that time to do this should be negotiated by all counselors as part of their regular load.

4. Counseling is not a first-aid station dispensing band-aids to students with a variety of ills. It should be an integral part of the total school, assisting students in making choices, plans and decisions, and better realizing their goals in a wide array of academic subjects. It is not an "extra" or a "special" school experience, but that

part of the school which particularly focuses on helping students internalize the vast array of learning experiences. It includes both subject matter and personal experiences that each individual needs in order to make appropriate plans and decisions relating to the present and the future. Counseling may be the glue that binds the disparate educational experiences together for a given individual and may very well help an individual see purpose in disconnected activities. In many cases, it will help students gain the direction in their activities which will make the labor and the challenge of their other experiences all the more meaningful because they now see them as leading to personally significant outcomes. Counselors should not apologize for the fact that their work in the school curriculum is different from that of others. They share the goals that the total school shares; but they, of necessity, must use a wider array of methods than those whose major focus is the learning of a specific academic discipline.

5. All students can benefit from a counselor's assistance in becoming more effective learners. In a changing society where the only certainty is uncertainty, the most important skill that students acquire may well be their ability to learn. In both their personal lives and their working lives, the capacity to undertake meaningful self-change and to be continually self-renewing in attitudes and skills may determine the quality of life that a person lives. Neither the number of subjects taken nor the hours devoted to study is a valid index of a person's learning effectiveness. Only through conscious attention to both the learning style and the specific skills possessed by a given person can each student achieve his/her potential as a learning person. In a learning society that places a premium upon lifelong learning, it becomes not only desirable but mandatory that each school give a major emphasis to assisting each student to develop his/her learning skills to the utmost. Becoming an effective learner is, however, more than a matter of the acquisition of a set of specific study skills in a "how to study" course. It involves self-esteem and the ability of a person to relate daily effort and activities to highly valued life goals and values. To be a truly effective person in learning situations, each student must, of necessity, know where he/she is going, how he/she is going to get there, and the things he/she needs to do to make the journey a smooth and rewarding one. Counselors, by training and inclination, are particularly suited to assist students in better understanding their own learning style, and to provide the experiences and insights they need to become more efficient and effective at learning to learn.

6. All behavior is a function of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. A deficiency or stunted growth in any one of these areas can seriously impair the overall performance of any student. Counselors, by tradition and training, have focused more on attitudes and information than they have on skill-building. As we move into a new era, counselors are breaking ground in realizing the importance of assisting clients to acquire the coping skills necessary for mastering the wide array of new challenges. Being knowledgeable about and having favorable attitudes toward such matters as technology and change are certainly desirable, but it must go farther than that. We need students who are motivated and informed about options, but who also have the skills to perform in a technological society and are able to make the decisions and commitments that will keep them self-renewing persons. The video arcade may be the area where some of the significant learning occurs for young people today. But it need not stop there. Counselors have the opportunity through the use of computer-assisted guidance not only to assist students to develop appropriate plans and decisions but to help them see the utility of technology and computers. Counselors can also help students acquire the interpersonal skills which are so important to them in their daily lives. These skills will assume even greater significance when they enter the work world where their ability to be interpersonally competent will be at least as important as their demonstration of academic knowledge and skills.

7. Systematic professional counselor development programs that relate to student outcomes should be developed. This is a double-barrelled necessity. First, it relates to the importance of clearly delineating the expectations we have of students and the responsibilities counselors have for assisting students to meet them. Secondly, we need to use these counselor responsibilities as the basis for determining our programs of professional counselor development and self-renewal. We need to pinpoint those areas where counselors bear the greatest responsibility for our expectations of students, and to provide counselors with the training and preparation necessary for effectively carrying out these responsibilities. Without a clear statement of the student outcomes that counselors are responsible for, we may well have a lot of counselor involvement in learning activities that have relatively little relevance or importance to their work as counselors in a specific school.

8. One of the most prized of all counselor skills and attitudes is their capacity to be flexible, adaptive, and willing to commit themselves to bringing about significant change in both the persons they work with and the environment of which they are a part. We will never be able to adequately predict all of the tasks and responsibilities in which counselors will be involved. The curriculum will never be totally encompassing of all the learnings and skills that each counselor must have to actively respond to the expression of the needs and interests of his/her students. We can, however, help counselors adopt the stance that only by constantly reviewing and renewing their skills can they hope to be a viable force for excellence in the schools in which they work.

Today, education is in a crisis. That crisis emphasizes the magnitude of the problem before us, and it also provides an opportunity for counselors to be involved and to contribute in ways not as readily apparent to them in the past. By clearly identifying both their responsibilities and their opportunities for contributing to educational excellence, counselors will increasingly become seen as a part of the school structure that is contributing to each student's quest for, and achievement of, personal excellence. By their assistance to individual students, counselors can help to insure that excellence will become a way of life for students, rather than a limited goal restricted to the completion of specific courses or the overcoming of educational obstacles.